

Tulsa World

Computer Aids Abuse Victims

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On any given day, the crowds bustling through the Tulsa County Courthouse can be intimidating. It can be especially daunting for abuse victims seeking relief from their problems through a protective order.

Some may forgo the process because getting help seems a veritable labyrinth of courthouse procedure.

Now the gap between the victim and the legal system has been shortened through a new interactive computer program. At the ICAN kiosk, petitioners can fill out the necessary paperwork and file protective order requests within minutes. Additionally, emergency orders can also be processed, and an instructional video for making an escape plan can be viewed.

The ICAN -- or Interactive Computer Access Network -- kiosk will be activated Thursday at the Tulsa County Courthouse, Fifth Street and Denver Avenue.

The protective order assistance module, located on the first floor, is sponsored by Legal Services of Eastern Oklahoma, the Tulsa County Bar Association and Domestic Violence Intervention Services. Volunteers from the Retired Senior Volunteer Program will help people use the kiosk.

Tulsa County officials began the process of obtaining the system about a year ago, said Catina Drywater, program coordinator and Legal Aid attorney. The ICAN is based on an Orange County, Calif., program.

Advocates received an \$85,000 grant for the program from the national Legal Services Corp., and the Tulsa County Bar Association funded the kiosk.

Designed to be user-friendly, ICAN takes an applicant's information and processes the papers immediately. The completed forms are then taken by the applicant to the Court Clerk's Office on the second floor. From there, an applicant might be scheduled for a protective order hearing at either 10:30 a.m. or 3 p.m.

The program has a short video to show a petitioner where to take the completed forms.

The program is offered in both Spanish and English.

"We are experiencing such a rapid rise in the number of Hispanic families (that) we

wanted to address the whole problem and fill their needs," Drywater said.

Tulsa County referee Rodney Sparkman, who presides over the protective order docket, said he expects the program to be well- received.

"Anything that can help make it easier for those asking for help, who may not otherwise have assistance, is sure to be great," he said.

About 4,252 protective order applications were filed locally last year. Mengu Acun, DVIS attorney, said the kiosk will help take the load off an already strained system.

"We try to help as many as we can, but sometimes that's not quite possible," Acun said.

Tulsa is the first site for the interactive court program in the state, but Oklahoma City has already expressed a desire for a kiosk, Drywater said.

Officials want to expand the program to include other court filings.

Protective orders are intended to eliminate contact between a victim and an abuser through a legal edict.

The program's goal is to open new avenues for violence victims.

"Hopefully, this will give them (abuse victims) the confidence to file their protective order and to get it," Drywater said.